

FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF JESUS

FOLLOWING WITH TOTAL COMMITMENT

Test: Matthew 16:21-28 (v.24)

Introduction: Words, "From that time forth." (v.21) More plainly than ever before and without reserve, Christ revealed that the Son of the living God was going to be killed and raised again from the dead. Never before had so phenomenal an event happened, and never again would it happen. History would be made. "Jerusalem...that killed the prophets" was going to commit the ultimate crime—they were going to kill God's own Son (Matthew 23:27).

Note two facts.

1. Christ had already been telling His disciples about His death and resurrection for some time, but they had not understood.

Two primary reasons for their blindness.

First, the idea of a suffering Messiah differed radically from their **own idea** of the Messiah.

Second, the revelation had been hidden in pictures and symbols.

- Now, a significant switch in how Jesus went about preparing His disciples for His death.
- Christ no longer spoke in pictures and symbols, but **in simple and direct words.**

2. Disciples now understood more fully that Jesus was "**the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (v.16).

They had taken a great leap forward in their understanding of His nature, who He really was.

Now they needed to learn two things:

One that the real way into God's kingdom was through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

Two the path of suffering had to be taken not only by God's Messiah (Jesus), but also by the followers of God's Messiah (16:24-28).

Just imagine the radical difference between the two concepts...

- a **suffering Messiah** vs. a **conquering Messiah**
- a **suffering believer** vs. a **conquering believer**

Seeing the **radical difference** helps a person understand Peter's behavior and the reason why the disciples were so slow to grasp what Christ was saying, they **never completely understood until after the resurrection.**

God's plan to save the world is through the death of His Son, His sacrifice and self-denial, and the way of salvation for man is the same following Jesus' example.

I. Total Commitment Required Jesus to Die. (16:21-23)

A. His death was necessary: He "must go to Jerusalem to suffer." (v.21a)

- Words "must go" strong: a constraint, an imperative, a necessity was laid upon Christ.
- **He had no choice.** His death and resurrection had been planned and willed by God through all eternity.
- The prophets had predicted it; **He must fulfill the will of God**, for God had ordained His death (Matthew 26:54; Luke 24:26, 46).
- The **resurrection of Jesus Christ was also necessary.** (v. 21b)
- His resurrection-is clear to us, we can look back upon it, was never clear to His disciples.
- Why? It was to be a new experience. No one had ever risen from the dead never to die.

(John 2:19) "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up".

Christ revealed His death and resurrection in stages—revealed it only as the disciples were able to receive and bear the fact.

Christ always teaches us gradually and moves us along as we are able to learn.

B. His death arouses natural man. (v.22)

- Natural man rebels at the idea of the cross.
- Natural man wants another way other than the cross.
- This is what Peter was doing: rebelling against the idea that God's Son was to die, that His blood had to be shed for the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24).
- Peter could accept Jesus as "the Son of the living God," but not as the suffering Savior.
- "Peter took Him" means **caught hold of** - he grabbed Christ took aside for a conference.
- Peter "began to rebuke Him" - a forcible attempt to stop the idea of the suffering Savior.
- "This shall not be unto thee." [*must not happen to you*] Peter was out to stop the cross.
- Peter was urging Christ to follow his own human schemes instead of God's way.
- **Peter was zealous for God**, but he was mistaken and **ignorant in his zeal.**
- He did not understand that God was planning to save the world through Jesus' death.
- Such behavior is **the way of the world.** It is **the natural, carnal mind.**
- Man rebels and recoils against the idea of a suffering Savior who had to die for the sins of the world—a Savior who demands the same sacrifice and denial of His followers.

C. His death shows man to be an adversary of God. (v. 23a)

- The literal meaning of Satan in the words "get thee behind me, Satan" is "**adversary**".
- Peter was tempting Christ with the very same temptation that Christ had faced in the wilderness (Matthew 4:8-10).
- When a man refuses to accept God's plan for life, he becomes an adversary to God.
- **He opposes God's will** - man says that he knows what is best; he is **wiser than God.**
- **Christ abruptly turned to Peter and stopped him in his tracks.**
- He charged Peter with being Satan, with being under the authority of Satan, with speaking as Satan.
- He had become as Satan, **an adversary to God** and **God's plan for His Son** and for the salvation of the world.

(Acts 13:10) "And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, **thou enemy of all righteousness**, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"

D. His death reveals man's true nature. (v.23b)

- "Thou savorest not" - means to think; to mind.
- Peter did not have his mind or his thoughts in line with God's mind and thoughts.
- Peter's thoughts were worldly and self-pleasing, **not spiritual and pleasing to God.**
- He was using human reasoning not God's reasoning.
- The thought that God's Son had to die and shed His blood for the sins of the world was disgraceful to Peter. **In his mind such a concept was unfit for God.**
- "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." - The death of Christ reveals man's true nature, **a nature that uses natural and carnal reasoning instead of spiritual reasoning.**

II. Total Commitment is Demanded in Following Jesus. (v.24)

Christ gives four steps that are involved in total commitment:

A. A person must **will** to follow Christ. (V.24a)

- The word "**wills**" means to **desire, purpose, resolve, determine.**
- It is a deliberate willing, a deliberate choice, **a determined resolve to follow Christ.**
- If a person really wills and deliberately chooses to follow Christ, **then he has to do the following three things mentioned in this verse.**
- **Note:** the **choice is voluntary**; it is made by the person.
- It is the **individual who wills and chooses**; therefore, it is the **individual who must act and do the next three things in this verse.**

1. A person must **deny** self. (v.24b)

- The word "**deny**" means to **disown, forsake, reject, refuse, restrain, do without.**
- It means to **subdue, to disregard one's self and one's interest.**
- **Very simply, it means to say "no."**
- But note: the call is not to say "no" to some behavior or thing, **but to self.**
- A person is to **deny self**; and this **means much more than just being negative**, that is, giving up something and doing without something.
- It means that **we are to act positively**, to say "**yes**" to Christ and "**no**" to self.
- It means to **let Christ rule and reign in our hearts and lives, to let Christ have His way completely.**
- Of course, **if a person allows Christ to rule in his life, all negative as well as positive behavior is taken care of.**
- In the **Greek** the word "deny" is an **ingressive aorist** which means that **the person enters a new state or condition.**
- It means, "Let him **at once begin** to deny self."

2. A person must take up the cross. (v.24c)

People in Jesus' day knew what it meant to "take up" a cross. They saw scores of criminals bearing the cross to the place where they were to be executed, and they witnessed scores of crucifixions, some even by the side of the roads that led in and out of the cities.

- The **cross does not mean merely bearing one's particular hardship in life**, such as poor health, abuse, unemployment, bad parents, an unsaved spouse, a wayward child.
- **The cross is always an instrument of death, not just an object to carry or bear.**
- The **Christian is to die mentally and actively. He is to deny himself daily.**
- **He is to let the mind of Christ, the mind of humbling himself to the point of death, be in him and fill his thoughts every day (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 10:3-5).**
- **He is to put his will, his desires, his wants, his ambitions to death.**
- **In their stead, he is to follow Jesus and to do His will all day long.**

Note this is not negative, passive behavior.

- It takes positive, active behavior to *will, to deny self, to take up one's cross, to follow Christ.*
- A person has to act, work, get to it, be diligent, consistent, and enduring in order to die to self.

- **There are several ways the believer dies to self – spelled out – (Romans 6:11-13)**
"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God"

Note Six ways Believers should dies to self:

1. The believer reckons or counts himself crucified with Christ.
 2. The believer reckons or counts himself dead to sin, but alive to God.
 3. The believer does not let sin reign in his body.
 4. The believer does not yield his bodily members as instruments of sin.
 5. The believer yields himself to God—as much as those who are alive from the dead are yielded to God.
 6. The believer yields his bodily members as instruments of righteousness.
- One's hardship or burden can bring a person to the place where the Lord can deal with him.
 - Then that the hardship becomes the cross and denial of self that Jesus is talking about.

This is an act which can be described as committing all that one is and has to Christ.
It is an act that needs to be repeated every day (Matthew 10:38).

3. A person must follow Jesus. (v.23d)

- The word "follow" means **to be a follower or companion, to be a disciple.**
- It has **the idea of seeking to be in union with and in the likeness of.**
- It is following Christ, **seeking to be just like Him.**
- Again, **this is not a passive behavior**, but ***an active commitment and walk.***
- It is **energy and effort, action and work.**
- **It is going after Christ with zeal and energy, struggling and seeking to follow in His footsteps, no matter the cost.**
- Note that the steps of Christ led to death before they led to glory (Matthew 16:21).

III. Total Commitment is Only Reasonable in Following Jesus. (16:25-28)

(Romans 12:1-2) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, **which is your reasonable service.** And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

A. An abandonment of this life saves a person. (v.25)

- What does it mean - a person saves his life by losing it and loses his life by finding it?
- Key is "**for my sake.**" Christ says "whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."
- The person who abandons this life—**who sacrifices and gives all that he is and has for Christ**—shall save his life.
- But the person who keeps his life and what he has and seeks more and more of this life, shall lose his life completely and eternally.

The person who "saves his life"...

- by seeking to avoid the aging of the body and death and yet denies Christ—that person shall lose his life eternally.
- by seeking to make his life more and more comfortable, easy, and secure (beyond what is necessary) and neglects Christ shall lose his life eternally.
- by seeking the thrills, excitement, and stimulation of this world by ignoring Christ shall lose his life eternally.

The call of Christ is just what He says: **a life of denial that takes up the cross and follows in His steps.**

(Matthew 20:28) "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many".

(Luke 19:10) "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost".

B. A man's soul is worth more than the whole world. (v.26)

- The word soul is the same word translated "life" (v.25).
- Christ uses the word life in two senses.
- There are two stages, two existences to the same life: the life that exists on this earth and the life that shall exist beyond this life.
- Once a person (life) is born into this world, ***he shall exist forever.***
- It is just **a matter of where he goes after this world**: to be **with God** or to be **apart from God**.

C. A day of judgment is coming. (v.27)

- When Christ returns, the true value of sacrifice vs. self-satisfaction will be clearly seen.
- **Sacrifice for Christ will be abundantly rewarded**; self-satisfaction will be condemned.
- ***Man is to be judged according to his works.***
- The word "**works**" means **doing, working, acting**.
- It is **not isolated acts**, but **continuous behavior**.
- A person rewarded on the basis of **his continuous behavior, not isolated acts**.
(Matthew 7:23) "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity".

D. A promise is given of never having to taste death. (v.28)

This verse is much clearer when it is compared to Mark's account:

(Mark 9:1) "Verily, I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power".

Close: (Following With Total Commitment) Cost Jesus and will cost us also as His Followers!
Inv.

1. Have You followed Jesus to the Cross and give Him Your life? Are You In Christ Jesus?
2. Have You made a Willful decision to Follow Jesus Christ not matter what the Cost?
3. Have You went astray from Following Jesus as You once did in Your Life?

Intro:

46. Self-Denial

'Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.' -- [Matthew 16:24](#)

Self-denial was an exercise of which the Lord Jesus often spoke. He mentioned it several times as an indispensable token of every true disciple. He connects it with cross-bearing and losing life. ([Matthew 10:38, 39](#); [Luke 9:23](#); [Luke 14:27](#); [John 12:24, 25](#)) Our old life is so sinful, and remains to the end so sinful, that it is never in a condition for anything good. It must therefore be denied and mortified, in order that the new life, the life of God, may have free dominion over us. ([Romans 6:6](#); [Romans 8:13](#); [Galatians 2:20](#); [Galatians 5:24](#); [Galatians 6:14](#); [Col. 3:5](#)) Let the young Christian resolve from the very beginning to deny himself wholly, in accordance with the injunction of his Lord. At the outset, it seems severe: he will find that it is the source of inconceivable blessing.

Let self-denial reach our carnal understanding. It was when Peter had spoken according to the thought of the natural understanding, that the Lord had to say to him: 'Thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men.' You must deny yourselves and your own thoughts. We must be careful that the activity of our understanding with the word and prayer, in endeavouring to reach the knowledge of what is God's will, does not deceive us with a service of God that is not in spirit and in truth. Deny your carnal understanding; bring it to silence; in holy silence give place to the Holy Spirit; let the voice of God be heard in your heart. ([Matthew 26:21](#); [1 Cor. 1:17, 27](#); [1 Cor. 2:6](#); [Col. 2:18](#))

Deny also your own will, with all its lusts and desires. Let it be once for all unquestionable that the will of God in everything is your choice, and that therefore every desire that does not fall in with this will, must be mortified. Pray, believe that in the will of God there is heavenly

blessedness, and that therefore self-denial appears severe only at the outset, but, when you exercise yourself heartily in it, becomes a great joy. Let the body with all its life abide under the law of self-denial. ([Matthew 26:39](#); [Romans 6:13](#); [1 Cor. 9:25, 27](#))

Deny also your own honour. Seek not it, but the honour of God. This brings such a rest into the soul. 'How can ye believe,' says Jesus, 'which receive glory one of another?' Although your honour be hurt or reviled, commit it to God to watch over it. Be content to be little, to be nothing. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.' ([John 5:44](#); [John 7:18](#); [John 8:50](#); [1 Thes. 2:6](#))

Deny, in like manner, your own power. Cherish the deep conviction that it is those who are weak, those who are nothing, that God can use. Be very much afraid of your own endeavours in the service of God, however sincere they may be. Although you feel as if you had power, say before God that you have it not, that your power is nothing: continuous denial of your own power is the way to enjoy the power of God. It is in the heart that dies to its own power, that the Holy Spirit decides to dwell and bring the power of God. ([2 Cor. 3:5](#); [2 Cor. 12:9](#))

Deny especially your own interests. Live not to please yourself, but your neighbour. He that seeks his own life shall lose it; he that would live for himself shall not find life. But he that would really imitate Jesus, to share in His joy, let him give his life as He did, let him sacrifice his own interests. ([Romans 15:1, 3](#); [1 Cor. 10:23, 24](#); [Ephes. 2:4](#))

Beloved Christian, at conversion you had to make a choice betwixt your own self and Christ, which you should obey. You then said: 'Not I, but Christ' Now you are to confirm this choice every day. The more you do so, the more joyful and blessed will it be for you to renounce the sinful self, to cast aside unholy self-working, and suffer Jesus to be all. The way of self-denial is a way of deep heavenly blessedness.

There are very many Christians that observe nothing of this way. They would have Jesus to make them free from punishment, but not to liberate them from themselves, from their own will. But the invitation to discipleship still always rings: 'If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'

The reason as well as the power for self-denial, we find in the little word *Me*. 'If any man would come after *Me*, let him deny *himself*, and follow *Me*.' The old life is in ourselves: the new life is in Jesus: the new life cannot rule without driving out the old. Where one's own self had everything to say, it must be nothing. This it would fain not be: on this account there must be all the day denial of one's self, imitation of Jesus. He, with His teaching, His will, His honour, His interests, must fill the heart. But he that has and knows Him, willingly denies himself: Christ is so precious to him, that he sacrifices everything, even himself, to win Him. ([Galatians 2:20](#); [Phil. 3:7, 8](#))

This is the true life of faith. Not according to what nature sees or thinks to be acceptable, do I live, but according to what Jesus says and would have. Every day and every hour I confirm the wonderful bargain: 'Not I, but Christ:' I nothing, Christ everything. 'Ye died,' and no longer have power, or will, or honour; 'your life is hid with Christ in God:' Christ's power and will alone prevail. O soul, cheerfully deny that sinful wretched self, in order that the glorious Christ may dwell in you.

—New Life, The

4. In Producing Repentance

Man without Christ cannot repent: "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance" ([Acts 5:31](#)). Christ gave it as a "prince," and therefore to none but His subjects, those who are in His kingdom, in whom He rules. Nothing can draw men to repentance but the regenerating power of Christ, which He exercises at God's right hand; for the

acts of repentance are hatred of sin, sorrow for it, determination to forsake it, and earnest and constant endeavour after its deaths. But sin is so transcendently dear and delightful to a man out of Christ that nothing but an infinite power can draw him to these acts mentioned. Sin is more precious to an unregenerate soul than anything else in heaven or earth. It is dearer to him than liberty, for he gives himself up to it entirely, and becomes its servant and slave. It is dearer to him than health, strength, time, or riches, for he spends all these upon sin. It is dearer to him than his own soul. Shall a man lose his sins or his soul? Ninety-nine out of a hundred vote for the latter, and lose their souls on that account.

Sin is a man's self. Just as "I" is the central letter of "sin," so sin is the center, the moving-power, the very life of self. Therefore did Christ say, "If any man will come after Me, let him *deny himself*" ([Matthew 16:24](#)). Men are "lovers of their own selves" ([2 Timothy 3:2](#)), which is the same as saying that their hearts are wedded to sin. Man "drinketh iniquity like water" ([Job 15:16](#)); he cannot exist without it, he is ever thirsting for it, he must have his fill of it. Now since man so dotes on sin, what is going to turn his delight into sorrow, his love for it into loathing of it? Nothing but almighty power.

Here, then, we may mark the folly of those who cherish the delusion that they can repent whenever they get ready to do so. But evangelical repentance is not at the beck and call of the creature. It is the gift of God: "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" ([2 Timothy 2:25](#)). Then what insanity is it that persuades multitudes to defer the effort to repent till their death-beds? Do they imagine that when they are so weak that they can no longer turn their bodies they will have strength to turn their souls from sin? Far sooner could they turn themselves back to perfect physical health. What praise, then, is due to God if He has wrought a saving repentance in us.

—Practical Christianity

The Self Life

[Matthew 16:24](#)—*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

In the 13th verse we read that Jesus at Caesarea Philippi asked His disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" When they had answered, He asked them, "But whom say ye that I am?" And in [verse 16](#) Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus answered and said unto him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonas, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven. And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Then in [verse 21](#) we read how Jesus began to tell His disciples of His approaching death; and in [verse 22](#) how Peter began to rebuke Him, saying, "Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee." But Jesus turned and said unto Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offense unto me, for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Then said Jesus unto His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

We often hear about the compromise life and the question comes up What lies at the root of it? What is the reason that so many Christians are wasting their lives in the terrible bondage of the world instead of living in the manifestation and the privilege and the glory of the child of God? And another question perhaps comes to us: What can be the reason that when we see a thing is wrong and strive against it we cannot conquer it? What can be the reason that we have a hundred times prayed and vowed, yet here we are still living a mingled, divided, half-hearted life? To those two questions there is one answer: it is *self* that is the root of the whole trouble. And therefore, if any one asks me, "How can I get rid of this compromise life?" the answer would not be, "You must do this, or that, or the other thing," but the answer would be, "A new life from above, the life of Christ, must take the place of the self-life; then alone can we be conquerors."

We always go from the outward to the inward; let us do so here; let us consider from these words of the text the one word, "self." Jesus said to Peter: "If any man will come after me let him deny *himself*, his own self, and take up the cross and follow me." That is a mark of the disciple; that is the secret of the Christian life—deny self and all will come right. Note that Peter was a believer, and a believer who had been taught by the Holy Spirit. He had given an answer that pleased Christ wonderfully: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Do not think that that was nothing extraordinary. We learn it in our catechisms; Peter did not; and Christ saw that the Holy Spirit of the Father had been teaching him and He said: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonas." But note how strong the carnal man still is in Peter. Christ speaks of His cross; He could understand about the glory, "Thou art the Son of God;" but about the cross and the death he could not understand, and he ventured in his self-confidence to say, "Lord, that shall never be; Thou canst not be crucified and die." And Christ had to rebuke him: "Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou savorest not the things that be of God." You are talking like a mere carnal man, and not as the Spirit of God would teach you. Then Christ went on to say, "Remember, it is not

only I who am to be crucified, but you; it is not only I who am to die, but you also. If a man would be my disciple, he must deny self, and he must take up his cross and follow me." Let us dwell upon this one word, "self." It is only as we learn to know what self is that we really know what is at the root of all our failure, and are prepared to go to Christ for deliverance.

Let us consider, first of all, the nature of this self life, then denote some of its works and then ask the question: "How may we be delivered from it?"

Self is the power with which God has created and endowed every intelligent creature. Self is the very center of a created being. And why did God give the angels or man a self? The object of this self was that we might bring it as an empty vessel unto God; that He might put into it His life. God gave me the power of self-determination, that I might bring this self every day and say: "Oh, God, work in it; I offer it to thee." God wanted a vessel into which He might pour out His divine fullness of beauty, wisdom and power; and so He created the world, the sun, and the moon, and the stars, the trees, and the flowers, and the grass, which all show forth the riches of His wisdom, and beauty, and goodness. But they do it without knowing what they do. Then God created the angels with a self and a will, to see whether they would come and voluntarily yield themselves to Him as vessels for Him to fill. But alas! they did not all do that. There was one at the head of a great company, and he began to look upon himself, and to think of the wonderful powers with which God had endowed him, and to delight in himself. He began to think: "Must such a being as I always remain dependent on God?" He exalted himself, pride asserted itself in separation from God, and that very moment he became, instead of an angel in Heaven, a devil in hell. Self turned to God is the glory of allowing the Creator to reveal Himself in us. Self turned away from God is the very darkness and fire of hell.

We all know the terrible story of what took place further; God created man, and Satan came in the form of a serpent and tempted Eve with the thought of becoming as God, having an independent self, knowing good and evil. And while he spoke with her, he breathed into her, in those words, the very poison and the very pride of hell. His own evil spirit, the very poison of hell, entered humanity, and it is this cursed self that we have inherited from our first parents. It was that self that ruined and brought destruction upon this world, and all that there has been of sin, and of darkness, and of wretchedness, and of misery; and all that there will be throughout the countless ages of eternity in hell, will be nothing but the reign of self, the curse of self, separating man and turning him away from his God. And if we are to understand fully what Christ is to do for us, and are to become partakers of a full salvation, we must learn to know, and to hate, and to give up entirely this cursed self.

Now what are the works of self? I might mention many, but let us take the simplest words that we are continually using,—self-will, self-confidence, self-exaltation. Self-will, pleasing self, is the great sin of man, and it is at the root of all that compromising with the world which is the ruin of so many. Men cannot understand why they should not please themselves and do their own will. Numbers of Christians have never gotten hold of the idea that a Christian is a man who is never to seek his own will, but is always to seek the will of God, as a man in whom the very spirit of Christ lives. "Lo, I come to do Thy will, oh, my God!" We find Christians pleasing themselves in a thousand ways, and yet trying to be happy, and good, and useful; and they do not know that at the root of it all is self-will robbing them of the blessing. Christ said to Peter, "Peter, deny yourself." But instead of doing that, Peter said, "I will deny my Lord and not myself." He never said it in words, but Christ said to him in the last night, "Thou shalt deny Me," and he did it. What was the cause of this? Self-pleasing. He became afraid when the woman servant charged him with belonging to Jesus, and three times said, "I know not this man, I have nothing to do with Him." He denied Christ. Just think of it! No wonder Peter wept those bitter tears. It was a choice between self, that ugly, cursed self, and that beautiful, blessed Son of God; and Peter chose self. No wonder that he thought: "Instead of denying myself, I have denied Jesus; what a choice I have made!" No wonder that he wept bitterly.

Christians, look at your own lives in the light of the words of Jesus. Do you find there self-will, self-pleasing? Remember this: every time you please yourself, you deny Jesus. It is one of the two. You must please Him only, and deny self, or you must please yourself and deny Him. Then follows self-confidence, self-trust, self-effort, self-dependence. What was it that led Peter to deny Jesus? Christ had warned him; why did he not take warning? Self-confidence. He was so sure: "Lord, I love Thee. For three years I have followed Thee. Lord, I deny that it ever can be. I am ready to go to prison and to death." It was simply self-confidence. People have often asked me, "What is the reason I fail? I desire so earnestly, and pray so fervently, to live in God's will." And my answer generally is, "Simply because you trust yourself." They answer me: "No, I do not; I know I am not good; and I know that God is willing to keep me, and I put my trust in Jesus." But I reply, "No, my brother; no; if you trusted God and Jesus, you could not fall, but you trust yourself." Do let us believe that the cause of every failure in the Christian life is nothing but this. I trust this cursed self, instead of trusting Jesus. I trust my own strength, instead of the almighty strength of God. And that is why Christ says, "This self must be denied."

Then there is self-exaltation, another form of the works of self. Ah, how much pride and jealousy is there in the Christian world; how much sensitiveness to what men say of us or think of us; how much desire of human praise and pleasing men, instead of always living in the presence of God, with the one thought: "Am I pleasing to Him?" Christ said, "How can ye believe who receive honor one of another?" Receiving honor of one another renders a life of faith absolutely impossible. This self started from hell, it separated us from God, it is a cursed deceiver that leads us astray from Jesus.

Now comes the third point. What are we to do to get rid of it? Jesus answers us in the words of our text: "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me." Note it well.—I must deny myself and take Jesus himself as my life,—I must choose. There are two lives, the self life and the Christ life; I must choose one of the two. "Follow me," says our Lord, "make me the law of your existence, the rule of your conduct; give me your whole heart; follow me, and I will care for all." Oh, friends, it is a solemn exchange to have set before us; to come and, seeing the danger of this self, with its pride and its wickedness, to cast ourselves before the Son of God, and to say, "I deny my own life, I take Thy life to be mine."

The reason why Christians pray and pray for the Christ life to come in to them, without result, is that the self life is not denied. You ask, "How can I get rid of this self life?" You know the parable: the strong man kept his house until one stronger than he came in and cast him out. Then the place was garnished and swept, but empty, and he came back with seven other spirits worse than himself. It is only Christ Himself coming in that can cast out self, and keep out self. This self will abide with us to the very end. Remember the Apostle Paul; he had seen the Heavenly vision, and lest he should exalt himself, the thorn in the flesh was sent to humble him. There was a tendency to exalt himself, which was natural, and it would have conquered, but Christ delivered him from it by His faithful care for His loving servant. Jesus Christ is able, by His divine grace, to prevent the power of self from ever asserting itself or gaining the upper hand; Jesus Christ is willing to become the life of the soul; Jesus Christ is willing to teach us so to follow Him, and to have heart and life set upon Him alone, that He shall ever and always be the light of our souls. Then we come to what the apostle Paul says; "Not I, but Christ liveth in me." The two truths go together. First "Not I," then, "but Christ liveth in me."

Look at Peter again. Christ said to him, "Deny yourself, and follow me." Whither had he to follow? Jesus led him, even though he failed; and where did he lead him? He led him on to Gethsemane, and there Peter failed, for he slept when he ought to have been awake, watching and praying; He led him on towards Calvary, to the place where Peter denied Him. Was that Christ's leading? Praise God, it was. The Holy Spirit had not yet come in His power; Peter was yet a carnal man; the Spirit willing, but not able to conquer; the flesh weak. What did Christ do? He led Peter on until he was broken down in utter self-abasement, and humbled in the depths of sorrow. Jesus led him on, past the grave, through the Resurrection, up to Pentecost, and the

Holy Spirit came, and in the Holy Spirit Christ with His divine life came, and then it was, "Christ liveth in me."

There is but one way of being delivered from this life of self. We must follow Christ, set our hearts upon Him, listen to His teachings, give ourselves up every day, that He may be all to us, and by the power of Christ the denial of self will be a blessed, unceasing reality. Never for one hour do I expect the Christian to reach a stage at which he can say, "I have no self to deny;" never for one moment in which he can say, "I do not need to deny self." No, this fellowship with the cross of Christ will be an unceasing denial of self every hour and every moment by the grace of God. There is no place where there is full deliverance from the power of this sinful self. We are to be crucified with Christ Jesus. We are to live with Him as those who have never been baptized into His death. Think of that! Christ had no sinful self, but He had a self and that self He actually gave up unto death. In Gethsemane He said, "Father, not My will." That unsinning self He gave up unto death that He might receive it again out of the grave from God, raised up and glorified. Can we expect to go to Heaven in any other way than He went? Beware! remember that Christ descended into death and the grave, and it is in the death of self, following Jesus to the uttermost, that the deliverance and the life will come.

And now, what is the use that we are to make of this lesson of the Master? The first lesson will be that we should take time, and that we should humble ourselves before God, at the thought of what this self is in us; put down to the account of the self every sin, every shortcoming, all failure, and all that has been dishonoring to God, and then say, "Lord, this is what I am;" and then let us allow the blessed Jesus Christ to take entire control of our life, in the faith that His life can be ours.

Do not think it is an easy thing to get rid of self. At a consecration meeting, it is easy to make a vow, and to offer a prayer, and to perform an act of surrender, but as solemn as the death of Christ was on Calvary—His giving up of His unsinning self life to God,—just as solemn must it be between us and our God—the giving up of self to death. The power of the death of Christ must come to work in us every day. Oh, think what a contrast between that self-willed Peter, and Jesus giving up His will to God! What a contrast between that self-exaltation of Peter, and the deep humility of the Lamb of God, meek and lowly in heart before God and man! What a contrast between that self-confidence of Peter, and that deep dependence of Jesus upon the Father, when He said: "I can do nothing of myself." We are called upon to live the life of Christ, and Christ comes to live His life in us; but one thing must first take place; we must learn to hate this self, and to deny it. As Peter said, when he denied Christ, "I have nothing to do with him," so we must say, "I have nothing to do with self," that Christ Jesus may be all in all. Let us humble ourselves at the thought of what this self has done to us and how it has dishonored Jesus; and let us pray very fervently: "Lord, by Thy light discover this self; we beseech Thee to discover it to us. Open our eyes, that we may see what it has done, and that it is the only hindrance that has been keeping us back." Let us pray that fervently, and then let us wait upon God until we get away from all our religious exercises, and from all our religious experience, and from all our blessings, until we get close to God, with this one prayer: "Lord God, self changed an archangel into a devil, and self ruined my first parents, and brought them out of Paradise into darkness and misery, and self has been the ruin of my life and the cause of every failure; oh, discover it to me." And then comes the blessed exchange, that a man is made willing and able to say: "Another will live the life for me, another will live with me, another will do all for me," Nothing else will do. Deny self; take up the cross, to die with Jesus; follow Him only. May He give us the grace to understand, and to receive, and to live the Christ life.

—Master's Indwelling, The

